

Heavenly UFO sets

by [Kurt Kuersteiner](#) , © [Monsterwax Monster Trading Cards](#) for [The Wrapper Magazine](#) issue #163)

See if you can spot the recent headline with the greatest historical significance:

"NATO Accidentally Bombs Refugees", "Judge Cites Clinton For Contempt", "Global Warming Continues", "Extra-Solar System Found", "Fiber Helps Colon".

It's only an opinion, but I believe the biggest news item of the decade- if not the century- was buried in the headlines beneath war news. Yes Virginia, there IS another solar system!

It was only a few years ago that the first planet outside our system was detected. Now scientists have found multiple planets around a single star (Upsilon Andromedae). Believe it or not, the odds of life on other worlds is now a statistical fait accompli.

The theory goes like this: There are billions of stars. If the closest neighboring stars have solar systems similar to ours, the likelihood is very great that stars everywhere have planets. Of the billions of planets, a small percentage would likely have oxygen, and a smaller percentage of those might have life. Perhaps even intelligent life. Perhaps even more intelligent life than ours.

What does all this have to do with cards, you ask? (X-files fans already know the answer.) UFOs! That's what! Who knows if they really exist or not, but if the President can look sincerely into the camera and lie about interns, then don't expect him to be forthcoming about the Men In Black.

All kidding aside, what was yesterday's science fiction is rapidly becoming today's science fact. It may be hundreds of years before other life is discovered, or it could be this year. But we will likely find something eventually unless... something finds us first.

Which brings us back to trading cards. UFO trading cards. Some of the weirdest and wildest cards ever made. Most everyone has seen Mars Attacks, Outer Limits or Lost In Space cards, but have you seen all the sets listed below?

UFO Trading Cards by Dark Horse were released in 1998 as a boxed set. This is nice series. All 50 color cards are painted by E. Silas Smith and written by Gale Roanoake. It "documents" the most famous UFO incidents to date. Some of the pictures are a little boring, like say, a painting of a typewriter or an Air Force General. But most of them are interesting and the backs are rather engrossing.

Many of the cards profile famous people who claim to have seen UFOs. Jimmy Carter isn't featured, but John Lennon and Muhammad Ali are. Star Trek fans might be interested to know there's a card with William Shatner on it. It seems Captain Kirk had a "close encounter" of sorts and tells us all about it. Senator Barry Goldwater is also included, but not because of what he saw, but rather, what he was NOT allowed to see. He claims that he made several attempts to visit the infamous Wright-Patterson AFB "Blue Room" to see what evidence they had about UFOs, but was denied clearance. Apparently, such evidence is classified "Above Top Secret" and beyond the level of a US Senator.

Another neat UFO series was sent to me out of the clear blue on Valentine's Day. It's an eight card set of valentines entitled Visitors (by Mello Smello). They measure 4 1/4 " x 2 3/4". The color graphics are very cool with either Aliens or UFOs on every card. But the most unique aspect about this series is that they glow in the dark! (Most people view their cards in the light, but if you're one of those who prefer dark, this set is just what the eye doctor ordered.) It also has the added distinction of being very affordable. The backs are blank except for the "Visitors" title and a spot to write who it is to and who it is from.

FATE Magazine was first published in 1948, featuring a cover story about a pilot named Kenneth Arnold. He claimed to have seen "Flying disks" hovering over Washington's Mount Rainier. His story is said to have started the UFO craze that is still with us today. And so is FATE Magazine. It includes stories about all sorts of paranormal events, including haunted houses, big foot, fire walkers- you name it. For their 50th anniversary celebration, they've created a 51 card set. The cards have full color reproductions of their classic covers from the last half a century. Some of these beautiful paintings are by Virgil Finlay, perhaps the most famous artist of the Pulp era. The text backs give a summary of the main cover story.

These sets were originally inserted in perforated sheets of five or six cards per magazine. They were distributed over a period of several issues. The copyright ranges between 1996 to 1998. They have recently been re-released as complete sets. They are printed on glossy albeit flimsy stock.

Some of the most campy UFO sets are from Spain. Otros Mundos (Other Worlds) was printed in 1984. It consists of 283 cards measuring 2 1/8" x 2 15/16". These cards look somewhat primitive, which only adds to their charm. The lion's share of this series is devoted to aliens. Every imaginable shape and size is represented. Squid-aliens, bug-aliens, frog-aliens, snake-aliens, bat-aliens, the list goes on. My personal favorite has got to be the wolfman-head on a penguin-body alien. (Don't laugh. He might slap you to death with his flappers.) There is also a section on robots and space ships.

All the cards fit in a large 9 1/4" x 13" album. There's a small (Spanish) paragraph telling about each creature next to its spot in the album. (The card backs are identical except for the number.) The cards are almost always pasted in the album with glue. Sometimes a larger picture is formed by pasting several cards together in two to four card panels.

Kids must have had a blast putting these sets together. They were immense, told an imaginative story, and looked really cool when completed. I'm surprised card albums were so successful in Europe and Canada, but never seemed to catch on in the USA. (At least not to the same degree.)

Another fun card series & album from Spain is Historia-Ficcion (History-Fiction). These cards are from the same company, same year, but smaller (1 13/16" x 2 9/16") and focus on warfare from the past and future. The cards on past wars are very dramatic, but the cards about war in the future are so bizarre, they're quite funny! Jets dive into the sea without smashing to bits, submarines are transported through the ocean via mile long whirlpools, and anti-gravity bombs float enemy forces into outer space. (How do you drop an anti-gravity bomb anyway? Isn't that kinda like throwing a boomerang bomb?)

Cards 134-137 demonstrate a typical military strategy from the future: Develop a flying saucer that can pick up tanks, lift them high into the sky, and drop them to their deaths. Never mind that the tank's gun barrel is directly beneath the saucer's vulnerable underbelly. (Maybe the enemy soldiers will be too fascinated with the beautiful sky tour to fight back.) Whatever the disastrous consequences, it still makes an entertaining four card panel.

The last 50 in this 266 card series are actually foil stickers of aliens. They feature colorful monsters (more bizarre than scary) against a mirror background. It should also be noted that the album is about 3/4" smaller than the Otros Mundos album.

All of the above series are colorful and enjoyable to collect. And who knows? In the future, they may become more than mere science fiction cards. They might actually turn into history cards...(?)

A special thanks goes to Jose Gonzalez Lazaro for his help in tracking down various Spanish sets.

Related Web Sites:

(The Extra Solar Project) <http://cannon.sfsu.edu/~gmarcy/planetsearch/planetsearch.html>

(Search for Extra-terrestrial Intelligence-SETI) <http://www.seti-inst.edu>

(Current UFO news) http://headlines.yahoo.com/Full_Coverage/Science/UFOs